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PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHTRO
DE RUEHGO #0306/01 1231004
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 021004Z MAY 08 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7457
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1099
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4646
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8187
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5749
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3622
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1501
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000306

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR USAID/OFDA, EAP/MLS, AND S/ES-O-CMS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: PREPARATIONS FOR CYCLONE NARGIS

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Cyclone Nargis is headed for Burma's Irrawaddy Delta and expected to make landfall this evening. Embassy Rangoon has issued warden messages and phoned coastal beach resorts. The DATT's office is attempting to establish direct contact with the regional commander of the effected area through their military liaison. Post is also in contact with the Myanmar Red Cross and United Nations officials coordinating possible international responses. The GOB has traditionally declined international assistance, as they did after the 2004 Tsunami. We expect the regime to be especially averse to accepting foreign assistance at this time, due to the political sensitivities surrounding the upcoming constitutional referendum. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Cyclone Nargis is headed for Burma's Irrawaddy Delta and expected to make landfall at approximately 1830 today. Our latest information indicates Nargis's path is headed very close to Rangoon. The storm's wind speed is down to 115 knots per hour and it is expected to lose strength when it hits land. Nargis is projected to have sustained wind of up to 70 knots by the time it hits Rangoon. Embassy Rangoon has issued warden messages and phoned Beach resorts on the West Coast to warn American tourists of the incoming storm. Most beach resorts have already closed due to the start of the rainy season.

¶3. (SBU) Burma's last major cyclone occurred in May, 2004, in Rakhine State, although other smaller ones have hit, including one last year. 17 people were killed but flooding affected almost 70,000 people. The Military's regional commanders are responsible for coordinating relief and security measures for natural disasters in their areas, along with the Myanmar Red Cross. The DATT's office has established contact with their military liaison officer, who asked for a formal request in writing to establish a direct liaison with the military commanders of the effected areas. They have not received a reply so far. Myanmar Red Cross representatives told us that the Department of Metrology and Hydrology had alerted Township General Administration Offices where the storm was likely to strike. The Township offices were instructed to prepare and coordinate with local NGOs,

including the Red Cross. Some townships have already done this. The Myanmar Red Cross is also in touch with the local office of the International Federation of the Red Cross, which is expected to take a lead role in any international humanitarian response, in cooperation with the United Nations.

¶4. (SBU) There have been some notices in the paper of the impending storm, and we were informed today that all domestic flights have been canceled for Saturday, May 3. The only domestic flights leaving Rangoon today are to Mandalay, where the GOB has decided to move all airplanes. The United Nations is in contact with its relevant operational partners to track the situation as it develops over the weekend and assess impact and damage from the storm. If needed, they will convene an emergency coordination meeting to evaluate the situation and a possible response.

¶5. (SBU) The UN expects the Irrawaddy Delta region to be hit hard, possibly resulting in major damage to rice crops. The local United Nations Response Coordinator, Julie Belanger, told pol/econ chief today that given Burma's poor communication infrastructure and the regime's penchant for secrecy, it may take a few days to assess storm damage and resulting needs. Belanger noted the cyclone was hitting at the worst possible time, immediately before the regime's May 10 constitutional referendum. Paranoia and secrecy are at an all-time high, and she fears the regime may even refuse the UN travel permission to assess storm damage.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The GOB traditionally has turned down international assistance, as it did after the 2004 Tsunami and after a cyclone and major flooding last year. We agree with Belanger that the regime may be especially averse to international assistance at what they consider a politically sensitive time. To better assess the situation, we will

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maintain contact with the UN and local NGO Metta, which was allowed access to areas in the Irrawaddy Delta after the Tsunami that foreigners were forbidden to visit. Post will

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keep State Ops, CMS, and OFDA posted regarding damage assessments. End comment.
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